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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION -- HAMAS VICTORY.

1. SUMMARY. Almost all media outlets reacted positively to the victory of Hamas in the recent Palestinian parliamentary elections. They also hailed the election process as democratic, free, and fair. In particular, they commended the Palestinian Authority for immediately accepting the Hamas victory. Local commentators, citing the principles of democracy, have criticized the U.S. and EU for threatening to cut aid to the Palestinian Authority if Hamas does not change its governing principles. END SUMMARY.

2. EDITORIAL COMMENTARY:

A. In the Islah-affiliated independent weekly Annas (circulation: 15,000) (01/30), regular commentator Dr. Fuad Al-Badani wrote: "The Hamas victory was a surprise to Israel, U.S., the EU and most Arab regimes. It is obvious that Islamist groups are making remarkable progress in those elections in which they participate."

B. Also in Annas (01/30), regular contributor Mohammad Al-Ghabri observed that negotiation with Israel will be the most complicated issue Hamas will have to deal with and concluded that, if true democratic elections took place throughout the Arab world, Islamist movements would be in power tomorrow.

C. In a third commentary in Annas (01/30) Ahmad Al-Faqeh commented: "Hamas's victory rang the danger bell for Israel, EU and the United States, all of whom began to deal differently with the Palestinian Authority following the Hamas victory." He concluded that some believe the Hamas victory was planned by Israel to set up an allegedly extremist group as rulers of Palestine and thereby justify their refusal to permit the establishment of a Palestinian state.

D. The weekly Islah-affiliated weekly Al-Asimah (circulation: 25,000) editorialized (01/29): "With the Hamas victory, the Palestinian people sent a message to the world that it is capable of making its own choices and not what others want. It elected those it believed most capable of running the country's internal and external affairs."

E. The Islah-party mouthpiece weekly Al-Sahwa (circulation: 25,000) editorialized (01/30): "The Palestinians elected Hamas because they know that Hamas will clear up the mess in the Palestinian territories and improve their living conditions as well as block frequent Israeli atrocities against the Palestinian people."

F. The weekly mouthpiece of the Popular Forces Union party Manbar Al-Shura (minor circulation) editorialized (01/29): "Why all the U.S. and European contempt regarding the Hamas victory while Hamas was the choice of the Palestinian People?"

G. In the independent weekly Al-Wasat, Saeedah Tayeb wondered (02/01): "How will Hamas deal with the internal and external changes of Palestine at a time when its own capability to remain in power is doubted?...If Hamas's victory is a catastrophe, it is only a catastrophe for those who fear democracy and freedom."

H. In the widely-read, Islah-affiliated website Alsahwa.net (02/03), Naser Yahya noted that "The peaceful transfer of power between Fatah and Hamas represents a real commitment to democracy."

I. The official government daily Al-Thawra (circulation: 40,000) editorialized (01/27):
"The Hamas victory was attributable to the Israeli atrocities against the Palestinian people..."

J. In a second editorial, Al-Thawra (01/31) wrote that: "Those who are trying to implement the democratic project in the region should respect the will and choice of the Palestinian people even if the Hamas victory conflicts with their interests. It is also unfair to demand that Hamas recognize and peacefully coexist with Israel while turning a deaf ear to Israeli aggression against Palestinians."
KHOURY